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Perspective

Afghans and U.S. morality

By Rhea Talley Stewart

"I see that you are betting on the morality of the American people. I think that is a very good bet."

Those are the reassuring words Salman Gailani, a freedom fighter from Afghanistan, heard about two weeks ago from Rep. Sander M. Levin (D., Mich.).

But both the American people and Gailani have cause to be bewildered about the way American morality is being shown. True, the federal budget allocates \$280 million in aid for 1985 to the men fighting Soviet domination of their land, up from \$120 million in 1984.

At the same time, the United States last year sold \$2.6 million in civil airplane parts to the people the Soviet Union, installed in power when it invaded Afghanistan in December, 1979. These are the same people whose military aircraft drop bombs on Gailani's comrades and on the women and children of villages that shelter them.

The Soviet puppets in the Afghan capital of Kabul enjoy most-favored-nation status as our trading partners. Last year our trading with them, increased the U.S. deficit by nearly \$6 million. While we sent Kabul, in addition to those airplane parts, old clothes and cigarettes, we were importing such necessities of life, as licorice root, cashmere, goat hair and carpets, to the tune of twice our exports.

Most-favored-nation status would be removed from the Kabul regime under a bill introduced in the Senate last month by Sen. Gordon Humphrey (R., N.H.). The State Department, according to Afghanistan desk officer Phyllis Oakley, will not oppose this legislation. Yet initiative for it after five years of Soviet occupation came not from the State Department but from private citizens.

The exported airplane parts have been intended for the American planes that make up the fleet of the Afghan airline, Ariana. The newest of these is a DC-7 bought with a loan from the Export-Import Bank and delivered on Oct. 7, 1979, just a few months before the Soviet invasion.

That year, 1979, was hectic in Afghanistan, where a government that had been Communist since April,

1978, was finding internal resistance too hot to handle. The U.S. ambassador was murdered. Hafizullah Amin was almost murdered, but became president instead after the mysterious death of his predecessor. As a climax, the Soviets invaded.

In late 1984, Congress passed a measure to enable the United States to openly send aid to Afghan freedom fighters. While that bill was being debated, the Central Intelligence Agency, which had been sending covert aid all along, bombarded the American public with stories about the efficacy of that aid. The CIA wished its efforts to remain covert.

When the measure passed, few Americans knew about it. In the closing days of the Congress, Afghanistan's situation was lost in the flood of publicity on other matters. The message was received in Kabul, though; the Kabul New Times went into a hysteria of polemic.

On May 8, one result of that resolution became known when the State Department announced that we have sent openly, to Afghans resisting inside their country, \$4 million worth of humanitarian aid.

What about military aid? Are we now likely to send that openly?

"Not at all," says a United States Army officer. "If American trucks start to roll on the highways of Pakistan with arms for the Afghan resistance, Pakistan will be destabilized."

Pakistan is the conduit for weapons sent to the freedom fighters and distributes them according to its own politics. Being committed to a fundamentalist Islamic society, Pakistan is likely to favor freedom fighter groups with that orientation, rather than the more liberal, Westernized groups. Theology is the criterion, not combat effectiveness.

The rivalries among groups of Afghan freedom fighters have been well publicized. Recently the president of Pakistan issued an ultimatum: unite. He said he must have a central leader with whom to deal. Yet the manner of arms delivery tends to foster competitiveness and suspicion.

And when those weapons reach the combat zones, they are often found to be outmoded, defective and supplied with inadequate ammunition. Last month the supply officers of three resistance organizations told the Federation for American-Afghan Action that improvements in the delivery of weapons have been so slight as to be inconsequential. Two officers reported improvement of less than 10 percent, the third an actual decrease. This, in spite of a 150 percent leap in appropriations by the United States.

A National Security Decision Directive is imminent, which would offer a new serious policy for this country concerning Afghanistan. Meanwhile, people like Salman Gailani come to Washington seeking something better, only to be ignored by the State Department or received at a low level. And in the plains of Afghanistan the resistance missiles hit only one target out of four.

"An oversight" is the way a staff aide in the State Department is said to have explained continuing the Soviet-backed regime's most-favored-nation status for five years after the invasion. The deaths of brave men deserve closer attention. Salman Gailani deserves to win his bet on American morality.



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